

Chiara Gelmini

THRESHOLD RELATIONAL PRACTICES

Interdisciplinary artist & artistic
researcher — voice,
performance, participatory and
site-responsive practices

www.chiaragelmini.com

Trieste / Basel

Art as a space of encounter

I am an interdisciplinary artist and artistic researcher working across voice, performance, participatory art and site-responsive installation.

My practice is rooted in the philosophy of hospitality — not as a theme, but as a method: a way of approaching alterity while preserving its complexity.

Trained in visual and performing arts at IUAV University in Venice and in aesthetics and philosophy at the University of Trieste, my work has been shaped by long-term research on the figure of the traveling storyteller, together with reflections on otherness, neurodivergence, ancient family connections to Rom culture, fragmented memory and the unstable boundaries of identity.

Through installations, performative environments and relational situations, I develop temporary spaces of suspension — parentheses within everyday life where listening becomes an act of presence and encountering the unfamiliar becomes a form of self-awareness.

I am drawn to liminal environments: harbours, stations, domestic interiors, passages and waiting areas. These transitional spaces become relational devices — sites where identities, distances and forms of participation can temporarily shift.

RESEARCH AXES

HOSPITALITY AS METHOD

Artistic spaces that temporarily suspend habitual social dynamics and create conditions for encounter, attention and presence.

VOICE AS EMBODIED ARCHIVE

Voice as a living carrier of memory, affect and cultural transmission — sound that preserves difference while generating resonance.

THRESHOLD SPACES

Domestic interiors, harbours, stations, passages — transitional environments as perceptual and relational devices.

RELATIONAL LISTENING

Shared situations in which listening becomes an active, embodied form of participation rather than passive reception.

THE TRAVELING STORYTELLER

A figure who crosses borders, gathers voices and experiences, and returns transformed — structuring both the dramaturgy and ethics of the practice.

INTERDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

Moving fluidly between performance, music, visual environments, philosophy and participatory practices in response to specific contexts.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND ARTISTIC REFERENCES INFORMING THE RESEARCH INCLUDE

Jacques Derrida
Edmond Jabès
Gregory Bateson
Martin Parr

Casa de Stabile

2012 - 2021

Casa de Stabile — a historic early 20th-century residential building in Trieste designed by architect Max Fabiani — became the site of a long-term relational and site-responsive artistic research developed by Chiara Gelmini between 2012 and 2021 especially with the projects *(vicini / lontani)* and *Farewell Party*. Conceived as a temporary environment of encounter, listening and shared presence, the project transformed domestic interiors and transitional spaces into perceptual and participatory environments unfolding through collaborations with invited artists, performers and musicians.

(vicini / lontani)

2012

Rather than functioning as a conventional exhibition format, *(vicini / lontani)* explored curating as the construction of relational and perceptual conditions. Visitors were not addressed primarily as spectators, but as guests temporarily inhabiting a suspended space shaped through proximity, attention and participation.

The project emerged alongside the artist's Master thesis in Aesthetics and Philosophy at the University of Trieste, where the exhibition itself became part of the research process. The thesis "The political and ethical relevance of relational art" investigated relational art, hospitality and the political dimension of aesthetic experience through thinkers including Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas, Edmond Jabès, Jacques Rancière and Nicolas Bourriaud.

Central to the project was the idea of hospitality as an artistic and ethical practice: the transformation of the "spectator" into a "guest," and the creation of what Derrida defines as a temporary suspension beyond fixed roles and institutional structures. The apartment itself operated as a threshold space where intimacy, alterity and participation could coexist without predetermined forms of interaction.

The project intentionally blurred distinctions between artwork, social encounter and everyday life. Installations occupied bedrooms, corridors and domestic transitional spaces; musicians performed within stairwells and hidden architectural cavities; performers welcomed visitors as silent figures suspended between fiction and memory.

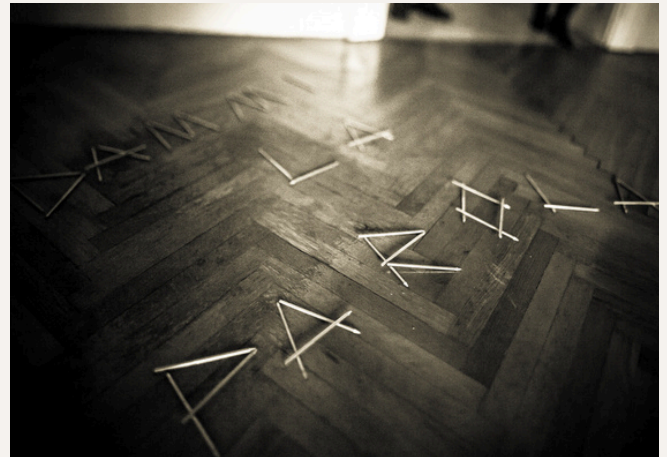
(vicini / lontani)

2012

Selected interventions and collaborative artistic works presented within (vicini / lontani).

Featured collaborators included Paolo Cervi Kervischer (top left), Chiara Gelmini (top right), Tiziano Bole (bottom left), Cristina Battistin (bottom right), Andrea Medeot, Valentina Milan, Aldo Vivoda and other invited artists and performers working across visual art, theatre, music and interdisciplinary practices.

Documentation photographs by Cosimo Barletta (CosPhoto)



Farewell Party

2021

during the Covid-19 period, ***Farewell Party*** was reimagined as a semi-invisible exhibition at Casa de Stabile, unfolding through distance and absence. Musicians performed from the building's windows while audiences listened from the street and the small harbour below, transforming separation itself into part of the dramaturgy. Inside, the apartment became a total installation centred around ***Memorabilia***: a fragile environment composed of found, forgotten and fabricated objects evoking uncertain family memories and emotional traces.

The project circulated primarily through word of mouth and remained intentionally semi-hidden. Only the final activation became publicly accessible: a site-responsive butoh performance unfolding through the rooms and installations, transforming the apartment into a final collective passage.

The research initiated through these projects is one of the artist's ongoing artistic and curatorial framework Threshold Relational Practices, investigating how spatial, vocal and participatory structures can generate temporary relational environments and perceptual shifts within contemporary contexts.



A detail of the site-specific installation Memorabilia

A Suitcase Full of Notes

2009 - present

An immersive performative environment where songs in their original languages become crossings: between geographies and memories, intimacy and displacement, difference and recognition.

A Suitcase Full of Notes — performative concert format developed by artist and performer Chiara Gelmini through voice, guitar, accordion and an expandable ensemble of instruments.

A long-term authorial performative project developed since 2009, unfolding as an immersive concert experience travelling through songs in their original languages from over twenty countries across the Americas, Eurasia and Africa.

On stage, a suitcase gradually opens and transforms into a map: each song becomes a passage into a different geography, soundscape and emotional climate. Water and the sea recurrently emerge throughout the repertoire — as routes, crossings, memories and thresholds connecting distant shores.

Moving between traditional music, folk heritage and contemporary songwriting, the project investigates how listening can generate proximity while preserving difference. Rather than presenting cultural identities as fixed representations, the concert constructs a shared relational environment where unfamiliar languages, recurring emotional patterns and collective memories create unexpected forms of recognition and resonance.

The voice functions as a space of passage — inhabiting different linguistic and musical territories while maintaining their distinct textures, rhythms and emotional atmospheres. Singing in original languages becomes both artistic gesture and ethical position: listening before defining, resonating before labelling.

Central to the project is the figure of the traveling storyteller: a voice crossing borders, carrying fragments of distant worlds and temporarily transforming performance into a space of encounter. The concert format oscillates between intimacy and collective participation, between theatrical narration and musical immersion, inviting audiences to inhabit a temporary geography shaped through listening.

The suitcase itself operates both as scenographic object and conceptual device: a portable threshold, an archive of crossings, and a symbolic space where displacement, memory and imagination converge.

Over time, A Suitcase Full of Notes has evolved through concerts, performative contexts and interdisciplinary collaborations, becoming one of the central experiential and dramaturgical frameworks informing Chiara Gelmini's ongoing artistic research Threshold Relational Practices.



Current Research and Projects

Current Research and Projects / Summary

Summary

Currently based in Switzerland, I am developing new artistic and curatorial projects that expand my ongoing research into relational environments, listening practices and spatial perception within contemporary urban contexts, while fostering connections between artists, spaces and cultural perspectives.

These projects are open to dialogue — with spaces, institutions, residencies and curators interested in co-developing new relational environments within the Swiss cultural context.

Both projects are currently seeking contexts, partners and co-producers. I welcome conversations with exhibition spaces, cultural institutions and residency programmes interested in bringing them into existence.

Boarding Point / Seebahnhof

site-responsive installation

How powerful can the act of departing become?
Can a place of transit exist without destination?
What remains suspended between leaving and becoming?

Boarding Point / Seebahnhof unfolds as a temporary threshold environment situated somewhere between transit zone, imagined geography and collective projection. Through fragmented voices, traces, waiting rituals and suspended gestures, the work explores departure as a perceptual and existential condition rather than a geographical act.

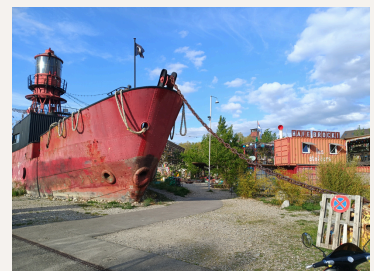
The work inhabits an in-between state: neither entirely real nor fictional, neither intimate nor public, neither arrival nor disappearance. Visitors navigate a space shaped through uncertainty, listening and emotional displacement — a liminal territory where memory, anticipation and identity temporarily loosen from stable coordinates.

A waiting environment emerges within the urban landscape: part listening space, part imaginary harbour, part collective projection. Fragments of absent journeys and anonymous voices circulate throughout the installation, gradually forming a fragile and unstable archive.

Rather than reconstructing a real place of embarkation, *Boarding Point / Seebahnhof* investigates the symbolic and relational power of departure itself — the suspended moment in which identity loosens and perception becomes temporarily unsettled.

Developed in dialogue with the Swiss landscape — lakes, stations, contained horizons and systems of mobility — the project reflects on contemporary experiences of transition, displacement and unstable belonging within societies increasingly shaped by circulation and fragmentation.

The work continues the artist's ongoing artistic research *Threshold Relational Practices*, exploring how spatial, vocal and participatory structures can generate temporary relational environments and perceptual shifts through minimal gestures and shared acts of listening.



Things I Cannot Fully Recall

Photographic collection / perceptual archive

What remains of an image when recognition disappears?

Can memory survive without narrative?

At what point does a photograph stop documenting and begin drifting toward abstraction?

Things I Cannot Fully Recall unfolds through a constellation of accidentally blurred images in which recognition begins to dissolve. Faces, gestures, interiors and landscapes drift toward abstraction, leaving behind unstable traces suspended between memory, projection and disappearance.

Fragments of intimacy intermittently emerge throughout the work — fleeting gestures, emotional residues, uncertain proximities — forming a perceptual archive that resists stable narration. The images no longer function as documents, but as atmospheric surfaces where viewers are invited to navigate associations, absences and imagined continuities.

The work investigates what remains when images lose documentary certainty and memory loosens from narrative structure. Generated without intention, technical control or conscious composition, the photographs acquire meaning only later — through acts of selection, juxtaposition and exposure.

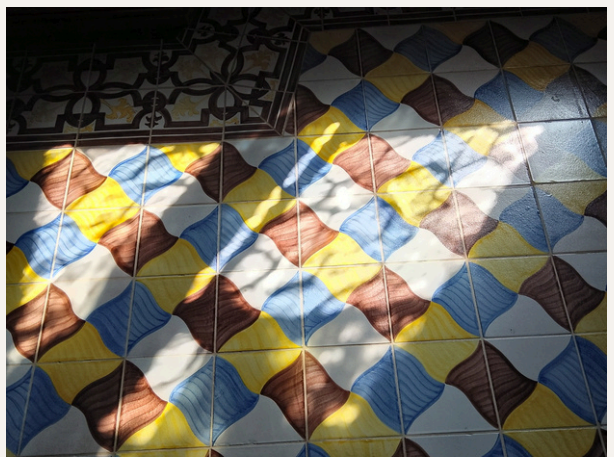
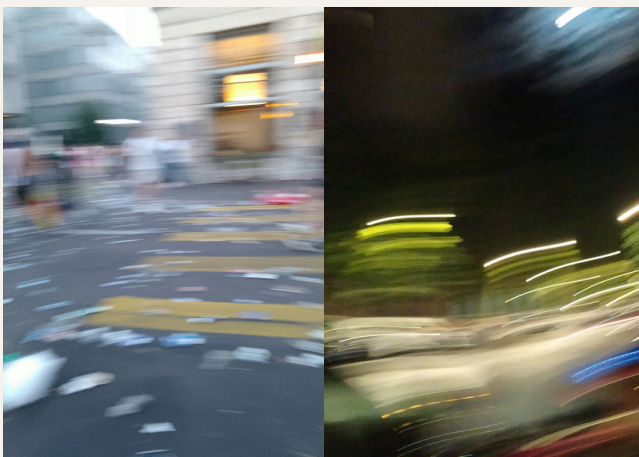
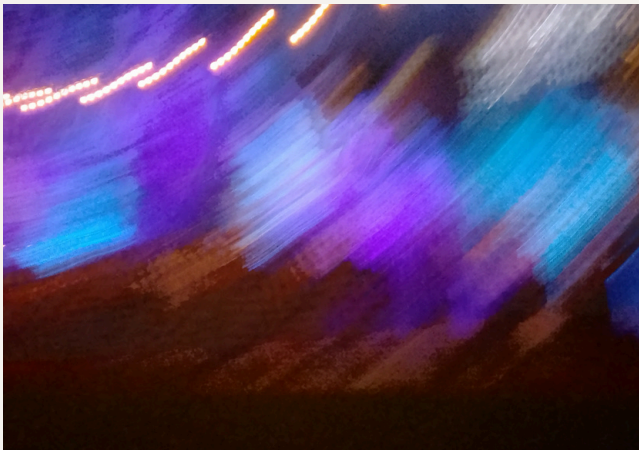
Rather than functioning as personal documentation, the images operate as unstable perceptual fragments: suspended between archive and disappearance, intimacy and abstraction, recognition and drift. Within the installation space, viewers are invited to construct their own associations between fragments, inventing emotional continuities and imagined narratives between images that may in fact remain entirely disconnected.

Things I Cannot Fully Recall also reflects on contemporary conditions of image production and consumption — the compulsive accumulation of personal photographs, the aestheticization of intimacy, and the unstable threshold between private memory and collective voyeurism within contemporary visual culture.

Developed within the Swiss cultural context, the project resonates with artistic and curatorial research around archives, perception, memory and the instability of representation. Through minimal visual gestures and suspended narrative structures, *Things I Cannot Fully Recall* continues Chiara Gelmini's ongoing artistic research Threshold Relational Practices, exploring how fragmented visual material can generate projection, emotional recognition and perceptual displacement.

Things I Cannot Fully Recall

Selection of collected research material for photographic collection / perceptual archive. Research is ongoing.





Further materials and project documentation are available upon request. I welcome conversations, collaborations and new encounters across artistic and curatorial contexts.

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